



# The Moment

## Checking In | Erwin Olaf

By ANNA CARNICK | FEBRUARY 3, 2010, 10:50 AM



The Dutch photographer Erwin Olaf's latest photo and video series, "Hotel" and "Dawn & Dusk," opened last week at New York's Hasted Hunt Kraeutler. The somewhat surreal exhibit reminds us of the artist's gift for highly detailed but ambiguous storytelling. "I want to trigger something in your head, so that you're going to make up your own story," he says. While the images of "Dawn & Dusk" are series of mirror images rendered alternately in black and white and then in color, the photographs that make up "Hotel" provide plenty of room for interpretation.

Inspired by Olaf's own travels, specifically time spent alone in rented rooms, the "Hotel" photographs feature beautiful models posing sometimes elegantly, sometimes demurely, at other times provocatively, in replica sets of hotels that Olaf himself visited in cities as varied as Kyoto, Japan; Winston-Salem, N.C.; and Paris.

The guest rooms themselves don't look all that different from one another until closer inspection. A lit message light on a phone, a pair of pants strewn over a chair, a discarded shoe — they all serve as fodder for the imagination.

Spare but calculated, Olaf's scenes are suggestive of Edward Hopper's work, and their cinematic nature reflects Olaf's evolution as an artist. It is the uneasy feeling they evoke, the mystery of each scene's role in a greater story, that draw one in. Connected by a sense of internal restlessness or longing, his nude and nearly nude subjects' faraway looks seem to imply a disconnect with the outside world or even, at times, a world that weighs down heaviest upon them in these moments of solitude. These are stunning photographs of beautiful people in familiar settings — striking a balance between the unapproachable and the accessible — but the real magic comes from the mystery Olaf creates around them.

"The older I get, the more I start to realize that I'm more influenced by cinema than by photography," Olaf says. "Although there are big, big beautiful photographs, when you are going to the cinema, you can always make up your own story. You have more emotion. I never cry over a photo, but I cry over a movie, or music or literature. That makes me always a bit jealous. So I want to achieve that a bit in my photography."

"Erwin Olaf: Hotel, Dawn & Dusk" runs through March 20 at Hasted Hunt Kraeutler, 537 West 24th Street